

Abuse Survivor Reveals How God Healed Her Deepest Wounds

Abuse survivors are not fragile individuals. They are strong; worthy individuals who have overcome tremendous suffering whether it was physical, sexual or verbal. Every form of abuse affects the person emotionally, lowering their self-esteem and sense of worth. The best way for a survivor to heal is to give a voice to what has been done or said to them; to be heard and to know they are supported and loved.
—Shannon M. Deitz

What has inspired you to reach out to others?

I am a survivor of rape and incest. The years I kept the facts of these traumas within me led me down some dark paths that were filled with bad decisions based on my lack of worth and self-esteem. I want to educate and reach out to other survivors before they get entangled in that dark path and make decisions that can affect them for the rest of their life, adding to the trauma of what has been done or said to them in the past.

You recently spoke at a women's prison. Tell us how that came about. How did the women respond to you and your story?

After speaking at a Women's Conference in Texas City, Texas, I was approached by a deacon who was a part of a prison ministry and felt many of the women would relate to my testimony and offer a sense of hope, even if they were not going to end their term in their lifetime. I have spoken at other prisons where many of the women were in for drug possession, prostitution, aggravated assault, and so forth. who would be released in three to five years.

In this particular prison, the women in the room with me were

in for murder or attempted murder. When I prayed about what I felt God wanted them to hear, it was Jeremiah 1:5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

The only thing that kept me from being in their shoes, in that prison, was the simple grace of God. These women had suffered many of the same abuses as I: incest, rape, domestic violence, but most especially, emotional abuse.

What put them in that prison was the biggest lie we are left with: "I am not worthy". They made choices that will remain with them forever and now that lie seems cemented into their soul.

But God's grace prevails, even in prison. No matter how long the sentence they serve, they are God's beloved. He knew them before He created them. He gave them a purpose, and that purpose can be carried out no matter the surroundings they live in. It's never too late. They can turn their sights on the Lord every day and reconnect with the gifts and talents He has given them and He will open the doors for their purpose to be fulfilled.

This is what saved me, and I prayed in some way it would give them the same hope. Paul was in prison for much of the end of his life, chained to guards too. And yet he still fulfilled his purpose of ministering and spreading the good news. It was what God had planned for him before he was born, and no matter his circumstance, because Paul acknowledged every door God opened, he fulfilled it to the end.

After visiting with these women, I knew I immediately wanted to go back again. They were welcoming, receiving and genuinely amazing women. The only difference between us was the civilian clothes I wore. I was invited to speak at the Angela House not long after, a halfway house for women coming out of prison. Once again, I witnessed the lie of 'I'm not worthy' threaten

their true purpose and freedom. I shared the same testimony and the same verse, because they no longer have to be bound by what was done to them—and what that shame, anger, guilt and rage caused them to do.

How has sharing your story with others helped you in your journey to healing?

The more you share the truth about your experience, the easier it is to accept it and move passed it in order to embrace your present and future. By sharing my story through both *Redeemed* and *Exposed*, speaking to groups and leading retreats, I find that it gives me strength and fortifies the healing process. What has been done to me is a part of who I am, but it doesn't define who I am. In fact, I've come to the place where I can thank God for every aspect of my life, the dark and ugly moments along with the joyous times, because He has brought good from it all and allowed me to recognize that I am stronger because of it.

Low self-esteem, especially among teens, has become a national epidemic. What do you want someone struggling with feelings of low self-worth to understand?

You are worthy! You are unique *and there is no one else in this world just like you*, and this world needs you and the skills and talents you have, because each one of us has been given a specific purpose to use these talents and gifts, and no one can replace you.

But I also have been in a place where I have felt extreme unworthiness and insecurity. I know if I heard someone say that, I'd doubt what those talents or gifts were, because I wasn't like everyone else. To that I say, "Would being like everyone else make you happy? Would going against who you are, what sparks interest and joy inside of you just to get others attention bring you joy? Most likely not."

The Hopeful Hearts Ministry offices were affected by Hurricane

Harvey with flooded offices. You and your son were also recused from your home by boat. Tell us how your ministry is moving forward despite catastrophic damage and loss.

We are dedicated to helping survivors of all forms of abuse. I have found in these past few weeks how that the trauma of water rushing in and overtaking your home, giving you no preparation only to steal any sense of comfort or security elicits the same fear, anxiety and betrayal as any other form of abuse. Physical borders do not define Hopeful Hearts Ministry. We have continued to move forward with God's grace and held our programs in homes hosted by donors. We continue to meet with men and women, peer to peer, to discuss the traumatic experiences they've been through whether it is from the flood or from abuse done in their past. {eoa}

Shannon M. Deitz *was 3 when a family member began abusing her. At 17, she was raped, and as a freshman in college, she was raped a second time. At the age of 27, with no place to turn, she found God, who surrounded her with His peace. It was the beginning of a love story that continues to unfold day by day.*

Hopeful Hearts Ministry *is a nonprofit organization founded by Shannon which supports long-term recovery of survivors of all forms of abuse through peer support, counseling and public awareness services. Learn more at .*